Mr Newton 13
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from the Author

A

DISCOURSE, &c.

[PRICE THREE SHILLINGS.]

BRITISH MUSEUM

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A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED TO THE

STUDENTS

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

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BY THE

PRESIDENT.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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DISCOURSE, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

IN the ſtudy of our Art, as in the ſtudy of all Arts, ſomething is the reſult of *our own* obſervation of Nature, ſomething, (and that is not little) the effect of the example of thoſe who have ſtudied the ſame nature before us, and who have cultivated before us the ſame Art, with diligence and ſucceſs. THE leſs we confine ourſelves in the choice of thoſe examples, the more advantage we ſhall derive from them; and the nearer we ſhall bring our performances to a correſpondence with nature, and the great general rules of Art. When we draw our examples, from remote and revered antiquity, (with ſome advantage undoubtedly in that ſelection) we ſubject ourſelves to ſome inconveniencies. We may ſuffer ourſelves to be too much led away by great names, and be too much ſubdued by overbearing authority. Our learning, in that caſe, is not ſo much an exerciſe of our judgment

as a proof of our docility. We find ourſelves, perhaps, too much overſhadowed; and the character of our purſuits is rather diſtinguiſhed by the tameneſs of the follower, than animated by the ſpirit of emulation. It is ſometimes of ſervice, that our examples ſhould be *near* us; and ſuch as raiſe a reverence, ſufficient to induce us carefully to obſerve them, yet not ſo great as to prevent us from engaging with them in ſomething like a generous contention.

We have lately loſt Mr. Gainſborough, one of the greateſt ornaments of our Academy. It is not our buſineſs here, to make panegyrics on the living, or even on the dead, who were of our body The praiſe of the former might bear the appearance of adulation; and the latter of untimely juſtice; perhaps of envy to thoſe whom we have ſtill the happineſs to enjoy, by an oblique ſuggeſtion of invidious compariſons. In diſcourſing therefore on the talents of the late Mr. Gainſborough, my object is, not ſo much to praiſe or to blame him, as to draw from his excellencies and defects, matter of inſtruction to the Students in our Academy. If ever this nation ſhould produce genius ſufficient to acquire to us the honourable diſtinction of an Engliſh School; the name of Gainſborough will be tranſmitted to poſterity, in the hiſtory of the Art, among the very firſt of that

riſing

riſing name. That our reputation in the Arts is now only riſing, muſt be acknowledged; and we muſt expect our advances to be attended with old prejudices, as adverſaries, and not as ſupporters; ſtanding in this reſpect in a very different ſituation from the late artiſts of the Roman School, to whoſe reputation ancient prejudices have certainly contributed: the way was prepared for them, and they may be ſaid rather to have lived in the reputation of their country, than to have contributed to it; whilſt whatever celebrity is obtained by Engliſh Artiſts, can ariſe only from the operation of a fair and true compariſon. And when they communicate to their country a ſhare of their reputation, it is a portion of fame not borrowed from others, but ſolely acquired by their own labour and talents. As Italy has undoubtedly a preſcriptive right to an admiration bordering on prejudice, as a ſoil peculiarly adapted, congenial, and, we may add, deſtined to the production of men of great genius in our Art, we may not unreaſonably ſuſpect that a portion of the great fame of ſome of their late artiſts has been owing to the general readineſs and diſpoſition of mankind, to acquieſce in their original prepoſſeſſions in favour of the productions of the Roman School.

On this ground, however unſafe, I will venture to prophecy, that two of the laſt diſtinguiſhed Painters of that country, I mean Pompeio Battoni, and Rafaelle Mengs, however great their names may at preſent ſound in our ears, will very ſoon fall into the rank of Imperiale, Sebaſtian Concha, Placido Conſtanza, Maſſuccio, and the reſt of their immediate predeceſſors, whoſe names, though equally renowned in their lifetime, are now fallen into what is little ſhort of total oblivion. I do not ſay that thoſe painters were not ſuperior to the artiſt I allude to, and whoſe loſs we lament, in a certain routine of practice, which, to the eyes of common obſervers, has the air of a learned compoſition, and bears a ſort of ſuperficial reſemblance to the manner of the great men who went before them. I know this perfectly well, but I know likewiſe, that a man, looking for real and laſting reputation, muſt unlearn much of the common-place method, ſo obſervable in the works of the artiſts whom I have named. For my own part, I confeſs, I take more intereſt in, and am more captivated with, the powerful impreſſion of nature, which Gainſborough exhibited in his portraits, and in his landſkips, and the intereſting ſimplicity and elegance of his little ordinary beggar children, than with any of the works of that School, ſince the time of Andrea Sacchi, or perhaps, we

may

may ſay of Carlo Maratti, two painters who may truly be ſaid to be Ultimi Romanorum.

I am well aware how much I lay myſelf open to the cenſure and ridicule of the academical profeſſors of other nations, in preferring the humble attempts of Gainſborough to the works of thoſe regular graduates in the great hiſtorical ſtile. But we have the ſanction of all mankind in preferring genius in a lower rank of art, to feebleneſs and inſipidity in the higheſt.

It would not be to the preſent purpoſe, even if I had the means and materials, which I have not, to enter into the private life of Mr. Gainſborough. The hiſtory of his gradual advancement, and the means by which he acquired ſuch excellence in his art, would come nearer to our purpoſe and wiſhes, if it were by any means attainable; but the ſlow progreſs of advancement is in general, imperceptible to the man himſelf who makes it; it is the conſequence of an accumulation of various ideas, which his mind has received, he does not, perhaps, know how or when. Sometimes indeed it happens, that he may be able to mark the time, when from the ſight of a picture, a paſſage in an author, or a hint in converſation, he has received, as it were, ſome new

and guiding light, ſomething like inſpiration, by which his mind has been expanded, and is morally ſure that his whole life and conduct has been affected by that accidental circumſtance. Such intereſting accounts we may however ſometimes obtain from a man, who has acquired an uncommon habit of ſelf-examination, and has attended to the progreſs of his own improvement.

It may not be improper to make mention of ſome of the cuſtoms and habits of this extraordinary man; points which come more within the reach of an obſerver; I however mean ſuch only as are connected with his art, and indeed were, as I apprehend, the cauſes of his arriving to that high degree of excellence, which we ſee and acknowledge in his works. Of theſe cauſes we muſt ſtate, as the fundamental, the love which he had to his art; to which, indeed, his whole mind appears to have been devoted, and to which every thing he ſaw was referred; and this we may fairly conclude from various circumſtances of his life which were known to his intimate friends. Among others he had a habit of continually remarking to thoſe who happened to be about him, whatever peculiarity of countenance, whatever accidental combination of figures, or happy effects of light and ſhadow occurred in proſpects, in the ſky, in walking the ſtreets, or in company.

If,

If, in his walks, he found a character that he liked, and whoſe attendance was to be obtained, he ordered him to his houſe; and from the fields he brought into his painting-room, ſtumps of trees, weeds, and animals of various kinds, and deſigned them, not from memory, but immediately from the objects. He even framed a kind of models of landſkips, on his table, compoſed of broken ſtones, dryed herbs, and pieces of looking glaſs, which he magnified and improved into rocks, trees, and water. How far this latter practice may be uſeful in giving hints, the profeſſors of landſkip can beſt determine. Like every other technical practice, it ſeems to me wholly to depend on the general talent of him who uſes it. Such methods may be nothing better than contemptible and miſchievous trifling; or they may be aids. I think upon the whole, unleſs we conſtantly refer to real nature, that practice may be more likely to do harm than good. I mention it only, as it ſhews the ſolicitude and extreme activity which he had about every thing that related to his art; that he wiſhed to have his objects embodied as it were, and diſtinctly before him, that he neglected nothing which could keep his faculties in exerciſe, and derived hints from every ſort of combination.

We muſt not forget, whilſt we are on this ſubject, to make ſome remarks on his cuſtom of painting by night, which confirms what I have already mentioned, his great affection to his art; ſince he could not amuſe himſelf in the evenings, by any other means ſo agreeable to himſelf. I am indeed much inclined to believe that it is a practice very advantageous and improving to an artiſt; for by this means he will acquire a new and a higher perception of what is great and beautiful in Nature. By candle-light, objects not only appear more beautiful, but from their being in a greater breadth of light and ſhadow, as well as having a greater breadth and uniformity of colour, nature appears to me in a higher ſtile; and even the fleſh ſeems to take a higher and richer tone of colour. Judgment is to direct us in the uſe to be made of this method of ſtudy; but the method itſelf is (I am very ſure of it) advantageous. I have often imagined that the two great colouriſts, Titian and Corregio, (though I do not know that they painted by night) formed their high ideas of colouring from the effects of objects by this artificial light: but I am more aſſured, that whoever attentively ſtudies, the firſt and beſt manner of Guercino, will be convinced that he either painted by this light, or formed his manner on this conception.

ANOTHER practice Gainſborough had, which is worth mentioning, as it is certainly worthy of imitation; I mean his manner of forming all the parts of his picture together; the whole going on at the ſame time, in the ſame manner as nature creates her works. Though this method is not uncommon to thoſe who have been regularly educated, yet probably it was ſuggeſted to him, by his own natural ſagacity. That this cuſtom is not univerſal appears from the practice of the painter whom I juſt now mentioned, Pompeio Batoni, who finiſhed his hiſtorical pictures part after part; and in his portraits completely finiſhed one feature before he proceeded to another. The conſequence was, as might be expected; the countenance was never well expreſſed; and, as the painters ſay, the whole not well put together.

THE firſt thing required to excel in our Art, or I believe in any art, is, not only a love for it, but even an enthuſiaſtic ambition to excel in it. This never fails of ſucceſs proportioned to the natural abilities with which the artiſt has been endowed by Providence. Of Gainſborough, we certainly know, that his paſſion was not the acquirement of riches, but excellence in his art; and to enjoy that honourable fame which is ſure to attend it.—That *he felt this ruling paſſion ſtrong in death*,

I am myſelf a witneſs. A few days before he died he wrote me a letter, to expreſs his acknowledgements for the good opinion I entertained of his abilities, and the manner in which (he had been informed) I always ſpoke of him, and deſired he might ſee me, once more, before he died. I am aware how flattering it is to myſelf to be thus connected with the dying teſtimony which this excellent painter bore to his art. But I cannot prevail on myſelf to ſuppreſs that I was not connected with him by any habits of familiarity; if any little jealouſies had ſubſiſted between us they were forgotten, in thoſe moments of ſincerity; and he turned towards me as one, who was engroſſed by the ſame purſuits, and who deſerved his good opinion, by being ſenſible of his excellence. Without entering into a detail of what paſſed at this laſt interview, the impreſſion of it upon my mind was, that his regret at loſing life, was principally the regret of leaving his art; and more eſpecially as he now began, he ſaid, to ſee what his deficiencies were; which, he ſaid, he flattered himſelf in his laſt works were ſupplied.

When ſuch a man as Gainſborough arrives to great fame, without the aſſiſtance of an academical education, without travelling to Italy, or any of thoſe preparatory ſtudies which have been ſo often recommended, he is produced

duced as an inſtance, how little ſuch ſtudies are neceſſary; ſince ſo great excellence may be acquired without them. This is an inference not warranted by the ſucceſs of any individual; and I truſt it will not be thought that I wiſh to make this uſe of it.

It muſt be remembered that the ſtyle and department of art which Gainſborough choſe, and in which he ſo much excelled, did not require that he ſhould go out of his own country for the objects of his ſtudy; they were every where about him; he found them in the ſtreets, and in the fields; and from the models thus accidentally found, he ſelected with great judgment, ſuch as ſuited his purpoſe. As his ſtudies were directed to the living world principally, he did not pay a general attention to the works of the various maſters, though they are, in my opinion, always of great uſe, even when the character of our ſubject requires us to depart from ſome of their principles. It cannot be denied that the department of the art which he profeſſed may exiſt with great effect without them; that in ſuch ſubjects, and in the manner that belongs to them, they are ſupplied, and more than ſupplied, by natural ſagacity, and a minute obſervation of particular nature. If Gainſborough did not look at nature, with a poet's eye, it muſt be acknowledged

ledged that he ſaw her with the eye of a painter; and gave a faithful, if not a poetical repreſentation of what he had before him.

THOUGH he did not much attend to the works of the great hiſtorical painters of former ages, yet he was well aware, that the language of the art, the art of imitation, muſt be learned ſomewhere; and as he knew that he could not learn it in an equal degree from his cotemporaries, he very judiciouſly applied himſelf to the Flemiſh School; who are undoubtedly the greateſt maſters of one neceſſary branch of art; and he did not need to go out of his own country for examples of that ſchool: From that he learnt the harmony of colouring, the management and diſpoſition of light and ſhadow, and every means which the maſters of it practiſed to ornament, and give ſplendor to their works. And to ſatisfy himſelf as well as others, how well he knew the mechaniſm and artifice which they employed to bring out that tone of colour, which we ſo much admire in their works, he occaſionally made copies from Rubens, Teniers, and Vandyck, which it would be no diſgrace to the moſt accurate connoiſſeur to miſtake, at the firſt ſight, for the Works of thoſe maſters. What he he thus learned, he applied to the originals of nature, which

which he ſaw with his own eyes; and imitated, not in the manner of thoſe maſters, but in his own.

WHETHER he moſt excelled in portraits, landſkips, or fancy pictures, it is difficult to determine: whether his portraits were moſt admirable for exact truth of reſemblance, or his landſkips for the portrait-like repreſentation of nature, ſuch as we ſee in the works of Rubens, Ryſdale, and others of thoſe Schools. In his fancy pictures, when he had fixed on his object of imitation, whether it was the mean and vulgar form of a wood-cutter, or a child of an intereſting character, as he did not attempt to raiſe the one, ſo neither did he loſe any of the natural grace and elegance of the other; ſuch a grace, and ſuch an elegance as are more frequently found in cottages than in courts. This excellence was his own, the reſult of his particular obſervation and taſte; for this he was certainly not indebted to the Flemiſh School; nor indeed to any School; for his grace was not academical, or antique, but ſelected by himſelf from the great ſchool of nature; and there are yet a thouſand modes of grace, which are neither theirs nor his, but lie open in the multiplied ſcenes and figures of life, to be brought out by ſkilful and faithful obſervers.

Upon the whole, we may juſtly ſay, that whatever he attempted he carried to a high degree of excellence. It is to the credit of his good ſenſe and judgment that he never did attempt that ſtile of hiſtorical painting, for which his previous ſtudies had made no preparation.

And here it naturally occurs to oppoſe the ſenſible conduct of Gainſborough in this reſpect, to that of our late excellent Hogarth, who, with all his extraordinary talents, was not bleſſed with this knowledge of his own deficiency; or of the bounds which were ſet to the extent of his own powers. After this admirable artiſt had ſpent the greateſt part of his life, in an active, buſy, and we may add, ſucceſsful attention to the ridicule of life; after he had invented a new ſpecies of dramatic painting, in which probably he will never be equalled, and had ſtored his mind with ſuch infinite materials to explain and illuſtrate the domeſtic and familiar ſcenes of common life, which were generally (and ought to have been always) the ſubject of his pencil; he very imprudently, or rather preſumptuouſly, attempted the great hiſtorical ſtyle; for which his previous habits had by no means prepared him: he was indeed ſo entirely unacquainted with the principles of this ſtyle, that he was not even aware,

aware, that any artificial preparation was at all neceſſary. It is to be regretted, that any part of the life of ſuch a genius ſhould be fruitleſsly employed. Let his failure teach us not to indulge ourſelves in the vain imagination, that by a momentary reſolution we can give either dexterity to the hand, or a new habit to the mind.

I HAVE however little doubt, but that the ſame ſagacity, which enabled thoſe two extraordinary men, to diſcover the true object, and the peculiar excellence of that branch of art which they cultivated, would have been equally effectual in diſcovering the principles of the higher ſtyle; if they had inveſtigated thoſe principles with the ſame eager induſtry, which they exerted in their own department. As Gainſborough never attempted the heroic ſtile, ſo neither did he deſtroy the character and uniformity of his own ſtile, by the idle affectation of introducing mythological learning in any of his pictures. Of this boyiſh folly, we ſee inſtances enough, even in the works of great painters. When the Dutch School attempt this poetry of our art in their landſkips, their performances are beneath criticiſm; they become only an object of laughter. This practice is hardly excuſeable, even in

Claude

Claude Lorrain, who had ſhewn more diſcretion if he had never meddled with ſuch ſubjects.

Our late ingenious acadamician Wilſon, has I fear, been guilty, like many of his predeceſſors, of introducing gods and goddeſſes, ideal beings, into ſcenes which were by no means prepared to receive ſuch perſonages. His landſkips were, in reality too near common nature to admit ſupernatural objects. In conſequence of this miſtake, in a very admirable picture of a ſtorm, which I have ſeen of his hand, many figures are introduced in the fore ground, ſome in apparent diſtreſs, and ſome ſtruck dead, as a ſpectator would naturally ſuppoſe, by the lightning; had not the painter, injudiciouſly (as I think) rather choſen that their death ſhould be imputed to a little Apollo, who appears in the ſky, with his bent bow, and that thoſe figures ſhould be conſidered as the children of Niobe.

To manage a ſubject of this kind, a peculiar ſtile of art is required; and it can only be done without impropriety, or even without ridicule, when we adapt the character of the landſkip, and that too, in all its parts, to the hiſtorical or poetical repreſentation. This is a very difficult

difficult adventure, and it requires a mind, thrown back two thouſand years, and as it were naturalized in antiquity, like that of Nicolo Pouſſin, to atchieve it. In the picture alluded to, the firſt idea that preſents itſelf, is that of Wonder, at ſeeing a figure in ſo uncommon a ſituation as that of the Apollo is placed, for the clouds on which he kneels, have not the appearance of being able to ſupport him; they have neither the ſubſtance nor the form, fit for the receptacle of a human figure, and they do not poſſeſs in any reſpect that romantic character which is appropriated to ſuch a ſubject, and which alone can harmonize with poetical ſtories.

It appears to me, that ſuch conduct is no leſs abſurd than if a plain man, giving a relation of a real diſtreſs, occaſioned by an inundation, accompanied with thunder and lightening, ſhould, inſtead of ſimply relating the event, take it into his head, in order to give a grace to his narration, to talk of Jupiter and his thunder-bolts, or any other figurative idea; an intermixture which (though in poetry, with its proper preparations and accompaniments, it might be managed with effect) yet in the inſtance before us would counteract the purpoſe of the narrator, and inſtead of being intereſting, would be only ridiculous.

THE Dutch and Flemiſh ſtyle of landſkip, not even excepting thoſe of Rubens, is unfit for poetical ſubjects; but to explain in what this inaptitude conſiſts, or to point out all the circumſtances that give nobleneſs, grandeur, and the poetic character to ſtile, in landſkip, would require a long diſcourſe of itſelf; and the end would be then perhaps but imperfectly attained. The painter who is ambitious of this perilous excellence, muſt catch his inſpiration from thoſe who have cultivated with ſucceſs the poetry, as it may be called, of the art, and they are few indeed.

I CANNOT quit this ſubject without mentioning two examples which occur to me at preſent, in which the poetical ſtile of landſkip may be ſeen happily executed; the one is Jacob's dream by Salvator Roſa, and the other the journey of the arc, by Sebaſtian Bourdon. With whatever dignity thoſe hiſtories are preſented to us in the language of Scripture, this ſtile of painting poſſeſſes the ſame power of inſpiring ſentiments of grandeur and ſublimity, and is able to communicate them to ſubjects which appear by no means adapted to receive them.—A ladder againſt the sky has no very promiſing appearance of poſſeſſing a capacity to excite any heroic ideas; and the arc, in the hands of a ſecond-rate maſter, would have little

little more effect than a common waggon on the high-way; yet thoſe ſubjects are ſo poetically treated throughout, the parts have been ſuch a correſpondence with each other, and the whole and every part of the ſcene is ſo viſionary, that it is impoſſible to look at them, without feeling, in ſome meaſure, the enthuſiaſm which ſeems to have inſpired the painters.

By continual contemplation of ſuch works, a ſenſe of the higher excellencies of art will by degrees dawn on the imagination; at every review that ſenſe will become more and more aſſured, until we come to enjoy a ſober certainty of the real exiſtence (if I may ſo expreſs myſelf) of thoſe almoſt ideal beauties; and the artiſt will then find no difficulty of fixing in his mind the principles by which the impreſſion is produced; which he will feel and practice, though they are perhaps too delicate and refined, and too peculiar to the imitative art, to be conveyed to the mind by any other means.

To return to Gainſborough: the peculiarity of his manner, or ſtile, or we may call it the language in which he expreſſed his ideas, has been conſidered by many, as his greateſt defect. But without altogether wiſhing to enter into the diſcuſſion whether a defect or not, intermixed

mixed as it was, with great beauties, of ſome of which it was probably the cauſe, it becomes a proper ſubject of criticiſm and diſcuſſion to a painter.

A NOVELTY and peculiarity of manner, as it is often a cauſe of our approbation, ſo likewiſe it is often a ground of cenſure; as being contrary to the practice of other painters, in whoſe manner we have been initiated, and in whoſe favour we have perhaps been prepoſſeſſed from our infancy; for, fond as we are of novelty, we are upon the whole creatures of habit. However, it is certain, that all thoſe odd ſcratches and marks, which, on a cloſe examination, are ſo obſervable in Gainſborough's pictures, and which even to experienced painters appear rather the effect of accident than deſign; this chaos, this uncouth and ſhapeleſs appearance, at a certain diſtance, by a kind of magic, aſſumes form; and all the parts ſeem to drop into their proper places; ſo that we can hardly refuſe acknowledging the full effect of diligence, under the appearance of chance and haſty negligence. That Gainſborough himſelf conſidered this peculiarity in his manner and the power it poſſeſſes of exciting ſurpriſe, as a beauty in his works, I think may be inferred from the eager deſire, which we know, he always expreſſed that his pictures, at the exhibition, ſhould be ſeen near, as well as at a diſtance.

The ſlightneſs which we ſee in his beſt works, cannot always be imputed to negligence. However they may appear to ſuperficial obſervers, painters know very well that a ſteady attention to the general effect, takes up more time, and is much more laborious to the mind, than any mode of high finiſhing or ſmoothneſs, without ſuch attention. *His handling, the manner of leaving* the colours, or in other words, the methods he uſed for producing the effect, had very much the appearance of the work of an artiſt who had never learnt from others the uſual and regular practice belonging to the art; but ſtill like a man of ſtrong intuitive perception of what was required, he found out a way of his own to accompliſh his purpoſe.

It is no diſgrace to the genius of Gainſborough, to compare him to ſuch men as we ſometimes meet with, whoſe natural eloquence appears even in ſpeaking a language, which they can ſcarce be ſaid to underſtand, and who, without knowing the appropriate expreſſion of almoſt any one idea, contrive to communicate the lively and forcible impreſſions of an energetic mind.

I think ſome apology may reaſonably be made for his manner, without violating truth, or running

any riſk of poiſoning the minds of the younger ſtudents, by propagating falſe criticiſm, for the ſake of raiſing the character of a favorite artiſt. It muſt be allowed that this hatching manner of Gainſborough, did very much contribute to the lightneſs of effect which is ſo eminent a beauty in his pictures; as on the contrary, much ſmoothneſs, and uniting the colours, is apt to produce heavineſs. Every artiſt muſt have remarked, how often that lightneſs of hand, which was in his dead-colour, or firſt painting, eſcaped in the finiſhing, when he had determined the parts with more preciſion; and another loſs he often experiences, which is of greater conſequence; whilſt he is employed in the detail, the effect of the whole together, is either forgot or neglected. The likeneſs of a portrait, for inſtance, conſiſts more in preſerving the general effect of the countenance, than in the moſt minute finiſhing of the features, or any of the particular parts. Now Gainſborough's portraits were often little more, in regard to finiſhing, or determining the forms of the features, than what generally attends a dead colour; but as he was always attentive to the general effect, or whole together, I have often imagined that this unfiniſhed manner, contributed even to that ſtriking reſemblance for which his portraits are ſo remarkable. Though this

opinion

epinion may be conſidered as fanciful, yet I think a plauſible reaſon may be given, why ſuch a mode of painting ſhould have ſuch an effect. It is preſuppoſed that in this undetermined manner, there is the general effect; enough to remind the ſpectator of the original; the imagination ſupplies the reſt, and perhaps more ſatisfactory to himſelf if not more exactly than the artiſt, with all his care, could have poſſibly done. At the ſame time it muſt be acknowledged there is one evil attending this mode; that if the portrait were ſeen, previous to any knowledge of the original, different people would form different ideas, and all would be diſappointed at not finding the original correſpond to their own conception; under the great latitude which indiſtinctneſs gives to the imagination, to aſſume almoſt what character or form it pleaſes.

Every artiſt has ſome favorite part on which he fixes his attention, and which he purſues with ſuch eagerneſs, that it abſorbs every other conſideration; and he often falls into the oppoſite error of that which he would avoid, which is always ready to receive him. Now Gainſborough having truly a painter's eye for colouring, cultivated thoſe effects of the art which proceed from colours, and ſometimes appears to be indifferent to or to neglect

neglect other excellencies. Whatever defects are acknowledged, let him ſtill experience from us the ſame candour that we ſo freely give upon ſimilar occaſions to the ancient maſters; let us not encourage that faſtidious diſpoſition, which is diſcontented with every thing ſhort of perfection, and unreaſonably require, as we ſometimes do, a union of excellencies, not perhaps quite compatible with each other.—We may, on this ground, ſay even of the divine Raffaele, that he might have finiſhed his picture as highly and as correctly as was his cuſtom, without heavineſs of manner; and that Pouſſine might have preſerved all his preciſion without hardneſs or dryneſs.

To ſhew the difficulty of uniting ſolidity with lightneſs of manner, we may produce a picture of Rubens in the Church of S. Judule, at Bruſſels, as an example; the ſubject is, *Chriſt's charge to Peter*; which, as it is the higheſt, and ſmootheſt, finiſhed picture I remember to have ſeen of that maſter, ſo it is by far the heavieſt; and if I had found it in any other place, I ſhould have ſuſpected it to be a copy; for painters know very well, that it is principally by this air of facility, or the want of it, that originals are diſtinguiſhed from copies.—A lightneſs

lightneſs of effect, produced by colour, and that produced by facility of handling, are generally united; a copy may preſerve ſomething of the one, it is true, but hardly ever of the other; a connoiſſeur therefore finds it often neceſſary to look carefully into the picture before he determines on its originality.

GAINSBOROUGH poſſeſſed this quality of lightneſs of manner and effect, I think, to an unexampled excellence; but, it muſt be acknowledged, at the ſame time, that the ſacrifice which he made to this ornament of our art, was too great; it was in reality, preferring the leſſer excellencies to the greater. To conclude. However, we may apologize for the deficiencies of *Gainſborough*, (I mean particularly his want of preciſion and finiſhing) who ſo ingeniouſly contrived to cover his defects by his beauties; and who cultivated that department of art, where ſuch defects are more eaſily excuſed; you are to remember, that no apology can be made for this deficiency, in that ſtile which this academy teaches, and which ought to be the object of your purſuit; it will be neceſſary for you, in the firſt place, never to loſe ſight of the great rules and principles of the art, as they are collected from the full body of the beſt

general practices, and the moſt conſtant and uniform experience; this muſt be the ground work of all your ſtudies; afterwards you may profit, as in this caſe I wiſh you to profit, by the peculiar experience, and perſonal talents of artiſts living and dead; you may derive lights, and catch hints from their practice; but the moment you turn them into models, you fall infinitely below them; you may be corrupted by excellencies, not ſo much belonging to the art as perſonal and appropriated to the artiſt, and you become bad copies of good painters, inſtead of excellent imitators of the great univerſal truth of things.

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